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Merchant of Venice affords little occasion for joy

By JAMIE PORTMAN
Southam News Services

STRATFORD — The Stratford Festival's new production of the *Merchant of Venice* offers little cause for rejoicing. It does afford intermittent pleasures, but in the final analysis it constitutes one of those theatrical occasions when the whole is considerably lesser than the parts.

Its director is the Toronto Tarragon Theatre's William Glassco, an artist of intelligence and sensitivity. Glassco directed *Kennedy's Children* for Stratford's experimental Third Stage last summer, and came through with a theatrical event of genuine stature.

This year, however, Glassco is working on Stratford's intimidating Festival stage, tackling one of Shakespeare's most dangerous plays. Visually, the production offers evidence of Glassco's ability to respond to the special challenges of the Festival Theatre in a fluid and convincing manner. The famous trial scene, for example, is beautifully composed and achieves a visual immediacy which is unusual. What is lacking is an accompanying dramatic sensibility to give the proceedings focus.

Indeed, this lack pervades the entire production — a production notable mainly for its curious flabbiness of texture and for the distressingly bad performances of its cast principals.

Glassco, in collaboration with his astute designer, Susan Benson, has given the play a never-never quality, more reminiscent of nineteenth century Ruritania than Venice.

But it's one thing to conceive the play as being once removed from reality, and to emphasize the fantastic and exotic, even to the point of embellishing it with pulsating gongs and whispering cymbals at appropriate moments. It's quite another to carry through the concept with conviction.

The famous trial scene, for example, is utterly lacking in suspense, save for the stark moment when Shylock is about to plunge his knife into Antonio's breast only to have Portia make her brilliant last-minute intervention.

Similarly, the celebrated scenes in which successive suitors attempt to win Portia's hand by solving the riddle of her three mysterious caskets offer heaven-sent opportunities for fantasy and wonder. In this production, they are a heady visual and auditory delight, with Gil Wechsler's superb lighting and Morris Surdin's translucent musical score setting the proceedings up for an excursion into enchantment. Yet the scenes remain resolutely earth-bound, thanks to the inadequacies of the acting.

It is possible to express qualified approval for the tender loveliness of Domini Blythe's portrayal of Jessica, and for the inspired clowning of Bernard Hopkins and Mervyn Blake in the roles of a conniving servant and his tottering old father. It is difficult to have much enthusiasm for anyone else.

Thorndike dead at 93

LONDON — (Reuter) — Dame Sybil Thorndike, the grand old lady of the British theatre, died yesterday. She was 93 years old.

Dame Sybil was one of the greatest and most versatile British actresses of the century.

For her services to the theatre, she was in 1931 given the equivalent for a woman of a knighthood. In 1970, Queen Elizabeth made her a Companion of Honor — an order restricted to 65 distinguished people.

Dame Sybil's eldest son, John Casson, said she died peacefully at her apartment in the London district of Chelsea after a heart attack.

In the seven decades her career spanned, her roles were almost innumerable: St. Joan, Medea, Lady Macbeth, Nurse Edith Cavell, Phedre, Mrs. Alving in Ibsen's *Ghosts*, Miss Moffatt in *The Corn Is Green* and many others.

George Bernard Shaw watched her play *Candida* in 1922, and remarked to a companion: "I have found my Joan." In his *St. Joan*, she made perhaps her greatest impact on the world of drama.

SYBIL THORNDIKE
. . . brilliant career

Reveen show unleering fun

By DANE LANKEN
of The Gazette

It would be so easy for a hypnotist to make his show leering, even cruel. After all, there are 10 people on the stage being hypnotized and a whole audience sitting back laughing at their antics.

But Reveen, to his credit, isn't like that. He keeps a tight rein on his subjects, and promises and indeed delivers a 'tasteful' show.

Such was the case last night when the Australian-born, Canadian hypnotist returned to Montreal for his first visit in almost three years. The Theatre Maisonneuve, where Reveen will spend the next week, was considerably — and disappointingly — less than full, but Reveen delivered an evening full of fun just the same.

In case there is anyone who hasn't seen him, what Reveen does is invite perhaps a hundred people onto the stage, and from them he selects a dozen "good subjects." These he puts through a series of suggested impersonations or games, all of which the subjects willingly follow.

And gimmick or not, it is amazing. Ordinary people like you or me stand on stage and "become" Margot Fonteyn or Charles Boyer or Tarzan or even a kangaroo. Others become convinced, again by suggestion, that Martians have landed, or that there is an elephant in the theatre.

Cornball sure, but funny, too. And because of Reveen's professionalism, good, clean fun.

Reveen has been doing his hypnotism act for more than 20 years and on several continents. He claims to have hypnotized over 66,000 people without any ill effects.

Yet though it is for his hypnotism act that we know Reveen, it is not his only accomplishment.

He has spent most of the last year in Las Vegas where he is the star of an extravagant magician act featuring "33 major illusions."

It is Reveen's plan, and indeed something he has already attempted, to adapt the magic act into a road-show and impress us with feats of illusion as handily as he does with hypnotism.

In the meantime, Reveen is doing his tried-and-true act at the Place des Arts' medium-sized theatre until June 15.

Piano contest's second round: smell of blood, roar of chords

Music
By
Jacob Siskind

The second round of the Monreal International Piano Competition got under way yesterday and seven of the semi-finalists were heard going through a more demanding program than that prepared for the first round.

The music in this second part of the contest, which is open to the public free of charge to anyone willing to make the trek out to Salle Claude Champagne, is more serious, more intellectually demanding than that in the first part of the competition.

Each entrant has to play a Scarlatti Sonata, a Beethoven Sonata, an etude by Canadian composer François Morel, a work composed by a compatriot and a major romantic or contemporary piece. The program is to last just over one hour.

A great deal can happen during the course of an hour in a competition.

Yesterday for instance, a contestant made a few mistakes, became more nervous, but then brought things back under control. Another contestant began nervously and never quite got all the wheels back on the rails.

That's part of the excitement of performing in a competition and it is also what a considerable portion of the audience turns out for — the smell of blood. It is not unlike the effect at a bull fight, or the way the Romans must have felt when captives and political prisoners were thrown to the lions.

Almost all the pianists yesterday were having trouble controlling the sound of the piano. Most of them hit the instrument so violently that the upper registers produced sounds not unlike the breaking of glass.

The one exception was the young lady representing Israel, Natasha Tadson, who with her music teacher recently emigrated to that country from the Soviet Union. While one might have disagreed with what she had to say about the music she chose, disagreed with her choice of program, and disputed the choice of editions (particularly in the Schumann Symphonic Etudes) — this young lady never allowed a meaningless sound to emerge from the piano.

You could disagree with her, but at least she was saying something. Which was more than most of the other performers were interested in doing.

There were thousands of notes played yesterday — hammered, slashed, hit, chopped, clipped, bludgeoned, mashed and even blurred. With the exception of this young lady, no one seemed at all interested in, or capable of listening to, the actual sound coming from the instrument.

I am certain that all the players thought they were producing agreeable noises. In fact they were not.

This, of course, has nothing to do with where Natasha Tadson will place in the competition. She may even be eliminated after this round for a variety of incomprehensible reasons. But of all the players yesterday she was the only one I'd care to hear again in a public recital in this city.

And I'll lay 1,000-to-1 odds that she is the only one of the lot who has a chance for a career as an important pianist.

Watch out for this little bundle of energy, sensitivity and keyboard mastery. She is going places!

Drowning in 'sensitivity,' Hill insufferably smug

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ
for The Gazette

Dan Hill, who won the Juno Award recently as best new Canadian singer, made his Montreal debut last night at the Golem Coffee House, where he is singing gross clichés of songs that have been packaged by himself and his record company to appeal to the naval-gazing instincts of his constituency.

His lyrics have been hyped as "sensitive" — which translates into his audience taking a bath in sensitivity. Hill's songs grope for easy rhymes and easy answers and easy observations and when he's singing them he is literally drooling with wisdom, love and understanding — and when practically every one of his lines is trite and banal, his whole demeanor comes across as insufferably smug.

Hill's subject matter tends to speak for a whole generation and its whole grab-bag of issues and themes: He sings of them as if he had read about them in some magazine article or on television. Thus, he's full of mourning for those who are "too vulnerable to dream" as well as for Canadians: "How hard it is living in the shadow of the U.S.A."

He explains how and why he wrote his little gems in smooth bits of patter in which he informs us that he was just sitting around the house one day (he must do a lot of that) and he just happened to be thinking about the dreams of the generation of the 1960s when there was supposed to be a revolution but no revolution came and that got him thinking about the failures and frustrations of everyone and, by golly, he started to write it all down.

Then there's the one about City Madness: "Oh wake up to the city's madness . . . blah, blah, blah."

Then there's his big hit: You Make Me Want To Feel. He sings in such a blatant imitation of stock Elton John phrasing that one knows immediately what Dan Hill's ambitions are.

At the Nelson

Despite jazzy sound, band drifts aimlessly

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ
for The Gazette

Komuzo is the name of a brand new and very different-sounding band of musicians making their debut this week at the Hotel Nelson's Evechê club.

The sextet offers a feathery melange of jazz and pop styles that seems designed to make their jazzy inspirations commercially acceptable. To this end, they have met with success — a first album is to be released in September.

The genesis of the band came more than two years ago, when multi-instrumentalists Michel Madore and Ron Proby began jamming and gigging together around town. Both had been heavily into new jazz stylings and now they've come up with something they hope will meet the tastes of a wider audience.

Although Komuzo's sounds are quite mellifluous at times, there is very little of the tense experimentation that characterizes the jazz process. Instead, the aim seems to have been to maintain a style that cannot be defined, and the result is a seemless wandering concoction that floats into dreamland — something similar to Mike Oldfield's pop success *Tubular Bells*.

Proby bubbles away on alto sax and flute, while Madore plucks out motifs on guitars, dulcimer and cymbalon. Together with Alain Groven (bass and tablas), Tim Jackson (keyboards), Henri Dent (guitar) and Franblin Kirmeyer (drums), they realize a mesh on instrumentation that verges on the exotic without being too way-out.

The main problem with Komuzo is that the carefully organized pastiche too often sounds derivative, and the musicians seem so intent on assimilating recognizable strains that the results suffer from a lack of urgency.

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ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN, Avenue. 1:00, 3:25, 6:10, 8:55
BAD NEWS BEARS, Claremont. 12:40, 2:50, 4:55, 7:00, 9:05
THE HOUSE ON CHELOUCHE STREET, Cote Des Neiges 2. Mon - Fri: 7 & 9. Sat - Sun: 1, 3, 5, 7, 9.
MISSOURI BREAKS, Palace. 12:45, 2:55, 4:55, 7:05, 9:10
HEDDA, Little Place Ville Marie. 1:05, 2:55, 4:55, 6:50, 8:55
WON TONTON THE DOG WHO SAVED HOLLYWOOD Seville. 1:00, 3:00, 5:00, 7:00, 9:00
WON TONTON THE DOG WHO SAVED HOLLYWOOD, Van Horne. 12:40, 2:25, 4:10, 5:55, 7:40, 9:25
END OF THE GAME, Westmount Square. 1:05, 3:00, 5:00, 7:00, 9:00
WON TONTON THE DOG WHO SAVED HOLLYWOOD, PLAY IT AGAIN SAM, Dollard Drive In 1. Gates open at 7:30
MISSOURI BREAKS — BRANNINGAN, Dollard Drive in 2. Gates open at 7:30
14 YEARS
BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID Atwater 1. Mon - Fri: 7:10, 9:10. Sat - Sun: 1:20, 3:10, 5:10, 7:10, 9:10
TAXI DRIVER, Atwater 2. Mon - Fri: 7:20, 9:20. Sat - Sun: 1:30, 3:30, 5:20, 7:20, 9:20
HOT POTATO — ENTER THE DRAGON, Bonaventure 1. Mon - Fri: from 10 a.m. Sat - Sun: from 1 p.m.
HOT POTATO — ENTER THE DRAGON, Cote des Neiges 1. Mon - Fri: 7 & 9. Sat - Sun: 1, 4:15, 7:33
ELIZA'S HOROSCOPE, Church of the Messiah. Daily 9 p.m. except Monday
ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST, Kent. 1:30, 4:00, 6:30, 9:00
GRIZZLY, Laval 1. 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:25, 9:25
VIGILANTE FORCE, Laval 4. 12:10, 3:05, 4:55, 6:50, 8:40
GRIZZLY, Parisien 1. 1:40, 3:40, 5:40, 7:40, 9:40
VIGILANTE FORCE, Parisien 2. 1:20, 3:20, 5:20, 7:20, 9:20
DON'T OPEN THE WINDOW, Parisien 4. 1:40, 3:45, 5:40, 7:35, 9:35
EMBRYO, Place du Canada. Sat - Sun: 1:15, 3:15, 5:15, 7:15, 9:15. Mon - Fri: 7:15, 9:15
GABLE & LOMBARD - W. C. FIELDS & ME, Place Victoria. 1:00, 5:13, 9:30
ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST, Place Ville Marie. 12:05, 2:20, 4:40, 7:05, 9:33
GRIZZLY, Snowdon. 1:15, 3:20, 5:25, 7:25, 9:05
THE SAILOR WHO FELL FROM GRACE WITH THE SEA, York. 1:15, 3:05, 5:00, 7:00, 9:00
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